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Converbs in Finnish and Komi: differences and similarities

In my presentation, I will take a look at verb forms in Finnish and Komi (-Zyryan) that function as converbs. I am trying to demonstrate that even though they are usually called by different names, converbs and converbal constructions in those two languages resemble each other in many ways. Some other converbs, on the other hand, are quite different in meaning. I will also look at those forms and constructions from the typological perspective. Some features can be understood (in part at least) by comparing them to converbal constructions in other languages, but the Finno-Ugric languages also seem to have something new to offer to the typology of converbs.

In accord with recent typological research (e.g. Haspelmath–König 1995), I use the term **converb** to refer to verb forms that function as free adjuncts that modify the main verb or the whole clause. In descriptions of most Finno-Ugric languages – including Komi – such verb forms have traditionally been labeled **verbal adverbs** or **gerunds**, or *деепричастия* in Russian. In traditional Finnish grammar, however, the verb forms used as converbs are not distinguished from the infinitives or the participles. In the following, I will call these, too, converbs; and, for example, instead of calling the form *tehdessä* the second infinitive inessive I will simply call it **the converb** *tehdessä*.

Firstly, I will describe the converbs that are in many ways similar in the two languages. Typologically, the most common type of converb expresses an action that occurs simultaneously with the main action, i.e. the action expressed by the main verb or the main clause. In Finnish and Komi, there are more than one such form. The Finnish converb *tehdessä* and the Komi converb in *-ig* have an entirely temporal meaning 'when doing something'. They may also have subjects of their own such as in (1); *šondi petigön ~ auringon noustessa*, 'when the sun was rising'. The *-ig* form is often followed by an instrumental or illative case suffix or even an enclitic postposition; that will be discussed below.

Mk 16:2

(1) Субота мөд лунö зэв асывнас, шондї петгөн, найö муисны дзеваніно.

Ensimmäisenä sapatın jälkeisenä päivänä he menivät haudalle varhain auringon noustessa.

'Very early on the first day after the Sabbath, they went to the tomb when the sun was rising.'

Both languages also have converbs of simultaneity that can be characterized as so-called **contextual converbs**. The Finnish form *tehdén* and the Komi form in *-ömön* also express an action that usually occurs simultaneously with the main action, but unlike the converbs *-ig* and *tehdessä*, here the temporal relation is secondary. They are called contextual because their concrete interpretation depends on the context in which they are used: in (2) the verbs for 'hurry' express the manner of *going*, but in (3) the verbs for 'sing' do not express any kind of manner but, rather, an attendant circumstance; the *singing* only occurs at the same time and the same place as the *walking*.

Mk 6:25

(2) Ньльыс дзик пыр тэрмасьöмөн муис өксы дінö – –

Tyttö meni heti kiiruhtaen kuninkaan luokse – –

'At once the girl went hurrying to the king --'

(Супанов 1992: 211)

(3) *Велӧдчысьяс сьылӧмӧн вольлӧны улич кузя.*

Oppilaat astelivat pitkin katua laulaen.

'The students were walking the street singing.'

The temporal relation of simultaneity is not emphasized; if this were the case, the converbs in *-ig* and *tehdessä* would be used. These forms usually have the same subject as the main verb – which is natural when it is the manner of an action that is described. However, these contextual converbs do not always express an action that is strictly simultaneous with the main action. Typologically, it is not unusual that such forms are used to express an action that leads to a state that persists during the main action. In (4) it is the **result** of *stooping down* that persists during the main action, the *untying*. The Komi converb in *-ömön* differs from the Finnish *tehdén* in that it can be used to denote so-called contact anteriority: in (5) the *entering* takes place immediately after *knocking the door*. In Finnish, another form, *tehtyä*, must be used.

Mk 1:7

(4) *Ме бӧпӧн локтӧ мейсь вынаджык, сійӧ, кодлыць ме ог шогмы копыртчӧмӧн разьны кӧмкотсьыс тасмасӧ.*

Minun jälkeeni tulee minua väkevämpi, jonka kengännauhaakaan minä en kelpaa maahan kumartuen avaamaan.

'After me one is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.' (lit. '...having stooped down...')

(Супанов 1992: 211)

(5) *Ёртъясӧй, ӧдӧсӧ тотшкӧдчӧмӧн, пырисны миян патераӧ.*

Oveen koputettuaan ystäväni tulivat asuntoomme.

'Having knocked the door, our friends entered our apartment.'

The third type of converb that is common to Komi and Finnish is typologically less frequent. The Komi form in *-tög* and the corresponding *tekemättä* in Finnish are negative in meaning. That is, they express something that does not happen such as *fearing* in examples (6):

Mk 5:34

(6) *Повтӧг мун да ло дзоньвидза --*

Mene pelkäämättä ja ole terve --

'Go without fear(ing) and be healed'

Negative converbs, like negative expressions in general, tend to neutralize many distinctions that are made by the corresponding affirmative expressions. For example, the difference between the two types of simultaneous converbs is neutralized. In fact, the negative converbs function as negative counterparts to most (temporal and non-temporal) converbs in the two languages. In addition, they are sometimes used non-converbally, as arguments for verbs meaning 'be' or 'leave'. It seems to me that the *-tög* form can always be translated into Finnish with the form *tekemättä* and vice versa.

Next, I will look at some of the differences between the converbs in Finnish and Komi. The most remarkable difference seems to lie in the meanings of the remaining temporal converbs. In Finnish there is the converb *tehtyä*. It may be called a converb of anteriority; it expresses an action that takes place **before** the main action as in (7), *auringon laskettua* 'after the sun had set'. In Komi there is no such converb. An anterior converb in *-myšt* is sometimes mentioned, but it is always added that it is archaic and not used in contemporary language. It was mentioned that the converb in *-ömön* may be used in the meaning of contact anteriority

(see example 5). In a wider sense of anteriority, there is another kind of non-finite construction that can be used: the verbal noun in *-öm* followed by one of the postpositions *böryn* or *mys't'i* as in (7):

Mk 1:32

(7) *Mutta illalla, auringon laskettua, Jeesusen luo tuotiin kaikki sairaat --*

А рытнас, шондї лэччөм бөрын, Исус дїнө вайөдїсны став висьысьсө --

'When evening came, after the sun had set, they brought to Jesus all who were ill --'

On the other hand, Komi has another type of temporal converb not found in Finnish. The converb in *-töd'z* expresses an action occurring after the main action, and it may be called a converb of posteriority. More precisely, two different kinds of posteriority can be discerned. In (8), the *-töd'z* construction is translated 'before the cock crows' but in (9) 'until Herod died'. The meaning of this converb is not only temporal. It is not unusual that converbs of posteriority can express the extent of the main action as in (10). There is a clear link between 'until' type of posteriority and extent; for instance, one may eat **until** he gets full or **to the extent** that he gets (or is) full. In Finnish it is most natural to use the corresponding finite subordinate clauses.

Lk 22:34

(8) -- *талун на петук чукө стчпөдз тэ кунмысь соссян менө төдөмысь.*

-- *ennen kuin kukko tänään laulaa, sinä kiellät minut kolmesti.*

'before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times'

Mt 2:15

(9) *Сэні сйө Ирөд кувтөдз олс.*

Hän oli siellä, kunnes Herodes kuoli.

'He was there until Herod died.'

Mt 14:20

(10) *Быд морт пөттөдзыс сөйис --*

Jokainen söi kyllikseen --

'They all ate, and were filled.'

The rest of the converbs are non-temporal in meaning. In Komi, the form in *-mön* functions both as a participle and as a converb. In its converbal use it has partly the same meaning as the converb in *-töd'z*; it, too, expresses the extent of the main action – as in (11) – but it cannot be used in the temporal meaning.

Lk 9:17

(11) *Цтав йөзис пөтмөн сөйсны --*

'id.'

In Finnish there is a converb of means, the form *tekemällä*, meaning something like 'by doing'. This meaning is close to manner so that it is sometimes in free variation with the converb *tehdén*. In (12) it is much more natural to use the special converb of means because the *worrying* is clearly understood to be a means to achieve the **aim**, *a longer life*. In Komi, however, only the converb in *-ömön* is used.

Lk 12:25

(12) *Kuka teistä voi murehtimalla lisätä elämänsä pituutta kyynäränkään vertaa?*

Кодї тын пысь ас вөсна эльөмөн вермас нюждны асьыс олөмсө весьт мында?

'Who of you by worrying can add to his life one cubit?'

Finally, Finnish has a special converb of purpose, the form *tehdäkseen*. Its non-finite counterpart in Komi, as in many other languages, is the infinitive that is preceded by a conjunction meaning 'in order to', as in (13). The subject of the *tehdäkseen* construction is usually the same as the subject of the main clause, and the same applies to *medym* + infinitive constructions in Komi. If the subject of the purpose clause is different, a finite subordinate clause must be used.

Mk 7:9

(13) *Taitavasti te teette tyhjäksi Jumalan käskyn noudattaaksenne omia perinnäis-sääntöjänne.*

Сюся ті вешті́нныд Енлысь тшöктöмсö, медым вöчны батьяслөн вежа видзана оланног серти.

'You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.'

In addition to the meaning of purpose, the form *tehdäkseen* occurs in a number of other, somewhat marginal (and non-productive) constructions. The so-called **intensity constructions** such as *pelästyä kuollakseen*, 'to be scared to death' describe exaggerated intensity of the main clause action. It is interesting to see that these constructions come close to Komi constructions with the converbs of extent, *-töd'z* or *-mön*: in Komi, one can say *kuvtöd'z povzyny* or *kuvmön povzyny*.

It was mentioned that the converb in *-ig* may be followed by an instrumental or illative case suffix or a postposition. Case suffixed converb forms are not exceptional in themselves; all the other forms mentioned above take case suffixes, too. But what is exceptional, however, in comparison to Finnish and many other languages, is that the form in *-ig* may be followed by some postpositions so tightly that the *-ig* form and postpositions are written together as one word, and the cliticized postpositions have even been called "postposition suffixes" (Karmanova 1998: 50–51). These postpositional forms usually do not **change** the meaning of simultaneity but rather **specify** it – not unlike conjunctions and prepositions with the English *-ing* form: *when ~ while ~ by ~ in doing*. The formations with the postposition *kežlö* are an exception, however. They indicate the time by which, or the event for which, the main action takes place. They are often used when speaking of some kind of readiness or getting ready for some event as in (14) where it may be called a converb of reason. The Finnish non-finite counterpart here is a verbal noun construction with the postposition *varten*.

Lk 9:52

(14) – – *найö вонсны Самарей öти сиктö дасьтыны ставсö Исус локтігкежлö.*

– – *he menivät erääseen Samaritan kylään valmistamaan kaiken Jeesuksen tulemista varten.*

'they went into a Samaritan village to make everything ready for Jesus' coming.'

Mk 14:8

(15) *Тайö аньыс вö чис, мый вермис: мавтіс менсьым вывтырöс водзвыв дзебигкежлам.*

Hän teki minkä voi: hän voiteli edeltäkäsän minun ruumiini hautaamistani varten.

'She did what she could: She anointed my body beforehand for my burial.'

Example (15) is extremely interesting: there the *-igkežlö* form is followed by a first person singular possessive suffix, which, however, does not refer to the **subject** of the converb but rather to its **object**, the one who is going to be buried. In the corresponding Finnish construction the possessive suffix also refers to the object, but with verbal nouns it is normal. If the Komi construction is to be understood as a converb construction, we would have to postulate something like an objective conjugation, something that does not exist in Komi otherwise. I believe that diachronically this is, in fact, a verbal noun construction but

synchronically less so since there are no real, productive verbal nouns in *-ig* in present-day Komi. The *-ig* form is a converb, and it seems natural to consider postpositional *-ig* constructions converbal as well. At least the meaning of *-igkežlō* constructions is so distant from the basic meaning of simultaneity that it might be better to regard it as a separate converb form.

To sum up, the usage of simultaneous converbs is very similar in the two languages, and these kinds of converbs are also typologically most common. The usage of the negative converbs is also identical. The rest of the converbs differ remarkably. Table 1 summarizes how different temporal relations can be expressed by non-finite constructions in Finnish and Komi.

Table 1. The most common non-finite means to express temporal relations in Finnish and Komi.

	Anteriority	Contact Anteriority	Simultaneity	Posteriority
Finnish	<i>tehtyä</i>	<i>tehtyä</i>	<i>tehdessä</i>	—
Komi	<i>-öm + böryn/myšt'i</i>	<i>(-ömön)</i>	<i>-ig</i>	<i>-töd'ž</i>

The use of the converb in *-ömön* to denote contact anteriority is best seen as a secondary function of a semantically vague contextual converb of simultaneity. Therefore, there are no true anterior converbs (with the exception of the obsolete converb in *-myšt*) in Komi, and it is the nonexistence of an anterior converb that makes Komi typologically exceptional. It is usually the case that if a language has only one converb, it is a converb of simultaneity. If there are two temporal converbs, the other one is a converb of anteriority like the Finnish *tehtyä*. It has even been argued (V. Nedjalkov 1995: 131; I. Nedjalkov 1997: 433) that a converb of posteriority – such as the converb in *-töd'ž* – always implies the existence of both simultaneous and anterior converbs so that instead of verbal noun constructions there should be a converb of anteriority in Komi, too, but Komi seems to break this rule.

The postpositional *-ig* forms – especially those with a sort of objective conjugation – are also interesting from both the typological and the Finno-Ugric perspective. In Finnish it is only the special converb of means, the form *tekemällä* that seems to be typologically unique or at least rare. In fact, it may be good to know that the other Finnish converbal constructions are quite ordinary cross-linguistically; it is only the traditional terminology that makes them seem so exceptional. I believe that in the future study of converbs, Finno-Ugric linguistics and language typology can benefit a lot from each other.

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